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### Redactie:

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Jurjens, Tijm Lanjouw, Jorn Seubers (hoofdredacteur),  
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Willemsen, Evelien Witmer  
Gasthoofdredactrice: Dr. Lidewijde de Jong

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## Inhoudsopgave

### Artikelen

- Karian, Greek or Roman?  
The layered identities of Stratonikeia at the sanctuary  
of Hekate at Lagina  
*Christina Williamson* 1
- Tafelwaar, lokale identiteit en keuze:  
hellenistisch Sardis in context  
*Mark van der Enden* 7
- Gladiatorenvoorstellingen en de keizercultus in Asia Minor  
De casus Pessinus  
*Angelo Verlinde* 14
- Marginale archeologie?  
De Oostelijke Voorstad van Sagalassos (Zuidwest-Turkije)  
*Johan Claeys* 23
- De dunne grens tussen joods en heidens verkennen  
Een sociaal-contextuele studie van het  
Huis van Dionysos, Sepphoris  
*Rick Bonnie* 30
- Een joods huishouden in Perea?  
De resultaten van de eerste opgravingscampagne op  
Tell Abu Sarbut in 2012  
*Margreet Steiner, Noor Mulder-Hymans en Jeannette Boertien* 38
- The Udhruh lines of sight:  
connectivity in the hinterland of Petra  
*Mark Driessen and Fawzi Abudanah* 45
- Colonia Augusta Achaica Patrensis  
Grafveld en identiteit in een Romeinse kolonie in Griekenland  
*Tamara Dijkstra* 53
- English summaries 60
- Recensies**
- Roman Palmyra: Identity, Community, and State Formation  
*Lidewijde de Jong* 63
- The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy  
*Frits Heinrich* 66
- The Archaeology of the Holy Land.  
From the Destruction of Solomon's Temple  
to the Muslim Conquest  
*Pieter Swart* 69

## Recensies, vervolg

Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit. Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus <i>Pieter Swart</i>	71
Petra: Wonder in de Woestijn. Tentoonstelling RMO Leiden <i>Sophie Teus</i>	73
Kingdoms and Principalities in the Roman Near East <i>Dies van der Linde</i>	75
The Ancient Near East, a life! Festschrift Karel Van Lerberghe <i>Francesca Ippolito</i>	78
Edge of Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians at Roman Dura-Europos <i>Robyn Le Blanc</i>	81

## Introducties op lopend onderzoek

Challenging Testaccio. Urban landscape history of a Roman rione <i>Onderzoeksproject (KNIR, SSBAR), Gert-Jan Burgers en Renato Sebastiani (projectleiders)</i>	83
‘Building tabernae’: How commercial investment changed the cities of Roman Italy (200 BCE - 300 CE) <i>Postdoc onderzoek (NWO), Miko Flohr</i>	84
The City Anatomy: Spatial Dimensions of Urban Societies. Reconceptualising the Ancient Urban Cityscape in Bronze Age Central Syria <i>PhD-project (UvA), Matteo Merlino</i>	85
Mapping the Via Appia <i>Onderzoeksproject (NWO, KNIR, VU, RU), Stephan Mols, Eric Moormann en Jeremia Pelgrom</i>	86
Landscapes of Early Roman Colonization: Non-urban settlement organization and Roman expansion in the Roman Republic (4th-1st centuries BC) <i>Research project (NWO), Tessa Stek and Jeremia Pelgrom (project directors)</i>	87

# Landscapes of Early Roman Colonization: Non-urban settlement organization and Roman expansion in the Roman Republic (4th-1st centuries BC)

*Research project (NWO), Tesse Stek and Jeremia Pelgrom (project directors)*

## Goals

This NWO funded (free competition humanities) project examines the role of Roman non-urban settlements in the formative phase of the Roman Empire. Both ancient and modern viewers have portrayed Roman colonies as key factors in the spread of the urban model and, typically, these new foundations are sharply contrasted with the non-urban settlement organisation that prevailed in the conquered native areas. The evidential basis for this view is, however, notoriously limited for the Mid-Republican period, the key phase of Roman expansion in Italy. The project therefore aims to systematically compare early colonial settlement organization with the situation in contemporary non-colonial control areas. In particular, it further explores non-urban settlements, which as recent epigraphic and archaeological work suggests, may have played a considerable role in early Roman expansion.

Using intensive field survey, remote sensing and geophysical analysis, the aim is to provide a comparable dataset and to test a new conception of early Roman colonization that is not based on the urban model, but on a distinct “multiple-core” settlement organization and institutional configuration. Such a model could shed a different light on the traditional notion of Roman colonies as key factors in the urbanization and “romanization” of the conquered territories. In particular, it would presuppose different mechanisms of cultural change by fragmenting the traditional monolithic city-state model and decentering urban centers as the only *loci* of societal and cultural development.

## Approach

The project empirically investigates the archaeology of two colonial territories, and compares them systematically with patterns of settlement in two equivalent landscapes that were not colonized (see figure 1).

Our research concentrates on two levels of enquiry. The first level consists of collecting and complementing existing archaeological field survey datasets for the colonial territories

of *Aesernia* (founded 263 BC, no. 1 on the map, figure 1) located in central Italy in the modern Apennine region of Molise, and of *Venusia* (founded 291 BC, no. 3 on the map, figure 1), in the south Italian undulating landscape of modern Basilicata. The settlement data of these colonial territories is weighed against that of adjacent indigenous territories with similar geomorphological characteristics (areas 2 and 4 on the map, figure 1), which have been sampled in the same fashion, using the same methodology and site classification criteria. Where necessary existing datasets are calibrated with new fieldwork. The resulting uniform site classification enables a direct comparison between colonial and non-colonial settlement systems, and allows testing the conventional theory that presumes substantial differences between these two systems. Also, we aim to examine which types of landscapes are most affected by colonization. The distinct landscape characteristics of the research areas (1 and 2 in the mountains on the one hand and 3 and 4 in the Lucanian-Daunian plain), combined with a detailed landscape reconstruction should allow this comparison.

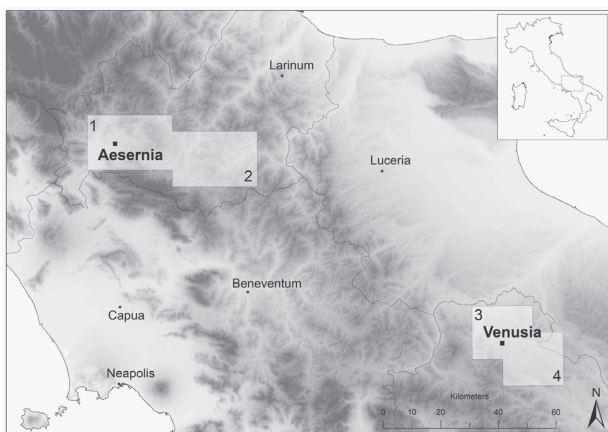
The second level consists of intra-site fieldwork in selected sites, geared to better understand the development and structure of nucleated rural sites.

An essential requirement for our settlement analysis is a better understanding of the black gloss ceramic typochronology in both research areas, and as part of the project specialists work on establishing and refining local frameworks on the basis of both existing and new datasets.

*Tesse Stek* is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University. Before coming to Leiden, he completed a PhD at Amsterdam University, worked at Radboud University Nijmegen, was a Rubicon fellow at the Faculty of Classics of Oxford University, as well as a Golding Junior Research Fellow at Brasenose College, Oxford, and a Marie-Curie Fellow at Glasgow University.

*Jeremia Pelgrom* is the Director of Ancient Studies at the Royal Netherlands Institute at Rome. Before joining the institute at Rome, he completed a PhD at Leiden University and worked at the Free University Amsterdam and Radboud University Nijmegen.

For the research team, affiliated researchers and institutions, and more information see:  
[www.landscapesofearlyromancolonization.com](http://www.landscapesofearlyromancolonization.com)



*Figure 1. The research area with the territories of the colonies of Aesernia (1) and Venusia (3) and the non-colonized control areas (2 and 4).*